



There's gold in them thar schools

Some of the most significant treasures and curiosities in British history, from Henry VII's golden cope to Alan Turing's reports, lie not in museums or galleries, but, unexpectedly, within independent schools, reveals **Madeleine Silver**

EACH autumn term, Harrow's new boys, freshly decked out with a straw boater and tentatively familiarising themselves with the 300-plus-acre campus, are ushered into a briefing by the school's curator. It's here that they learn about the generosity of their predecessors who bequeathed their collections to the school's Old Speech Room Gallery, an otherworldly compendium of curiosities, for future pupils to marvel at. Think Etruscan antiques, prehistoric implements and 19th-century watercolours by Turner, Ruskin and Cotman, as well as photographs by Old Harrovians Sir Cecil Beaton and Patrick Lichfield.

With more than 450 years of history, Harrow's collection might be staggeringly sprawling, but it's not alone. Eton College in Berkshire keeps the oldest known FA Cup programme, from 1882, a specimen of a kakapo, Henry V's will and a page from the draft of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

Across Britain, archivists at public schools are presiding over treasures that not only tell the story of these great institutions themselves—each library stove, corps uniform or house tankard providing a telling snapshot of Britain at that time—but with prized pieces that wouldn't be out of place in the finest of national galleries.

Churchill, Byron and Captain Pugwash at Harrow

Apart from two permanent displays featuring Greek vases and objects associated with 19th-century poet and old Harrovian Lord Byron,

Not every school library holds Mary Tudor's Book of Hours, but it's only one of many extraordinary artefacts at Stonyhurst

the Middlesex school's gallery offerings are cleverly rotated, so that nothing goes unseen by each generation of boys passing through—there is also a loans scheme in operation and boys learn about conservation and curating. 'From seeing a 5th century BC libation vessel being demonstrated in a classics lesson or the original sketches of Captain Pugwash and Harris Tweed, created by Harrow art teacher John Ryan in the early 1950s, to helping with the delivery of a bequest that included a portrait by Godfrey Kneller and paintings by Old Harrovian Richard Shirley Smith are truly special experiences,' says Harrow's curator Julia Walton. 'Having Churchill's *Distant View of Venice* or Queen Victoria's personally commissioned portrait of Old Harrovian Sir Robert Peel to gaze upon gives them a special appreciation for collections not only at school, but throughout life.'

The current exhibition in the Old Speech Room Gallery is 'Uncorking Old Sherry', celebrating the playwright Sheridan. The gallery is open to the public on February 28, March 1, 7, 13 and 20 (www.harrowschool.org)

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Stonyhurst's 'cloth of gold'

'The college's tradition of collecting precious artefacts for the edification of its pupils is a long one, dating back to October 1609,' explains the Lancashire school's curator of collections Dr Jan Graffius. 'In that month, Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio visited St Omers College [where the school was founded, in France] and wore a cope commissioned by Henry VII in 1495 for use in Westminster Abbey, which he described as a "rich and rare memorial". The sumptuous cloth of gold and silk velvet damask cope was laden with Tudor →

'These prized pieces wouldn't be out of place in the finest of national galleries'

symbolism and, for the exiled Catholic College of English boys, represented a thread of memory linking them back to a time before the Reformation. The cope is still at Stonyhurst, the property of the British Jesuit Province.'

The extraordinary collection also includes the prayer book of Henry VIII's mother, Mary Tudor's Book of Hours and a relic from the Crown of Thorns owned by Mary, Queen of Scots, plus alumnus Charles Waterton's collection of early-19th-century Amazonian rainforest fauna, preserved in arsenic and cited by Sir David Attenborough as the inspiration to protect the fragile natural world. *Stonyhurst's museum is open to the public at certain times (www.stonyhurst.ac.uk)*

Turing's hidden potential at Sherborne housed in the oldest part of the Dorset boys' school, in a building that originally formed part of the 13th-century cloister range of the Benedictine monastery, is an archive overflowing with a rare-book collection of about 100 volumes published between the 15th and 17th centuries, the oldest of which was printed in Venice in 1493. Perhaps Sherborne's most prestigious collection, however, is its Alan Turing archive, donated to the school by the

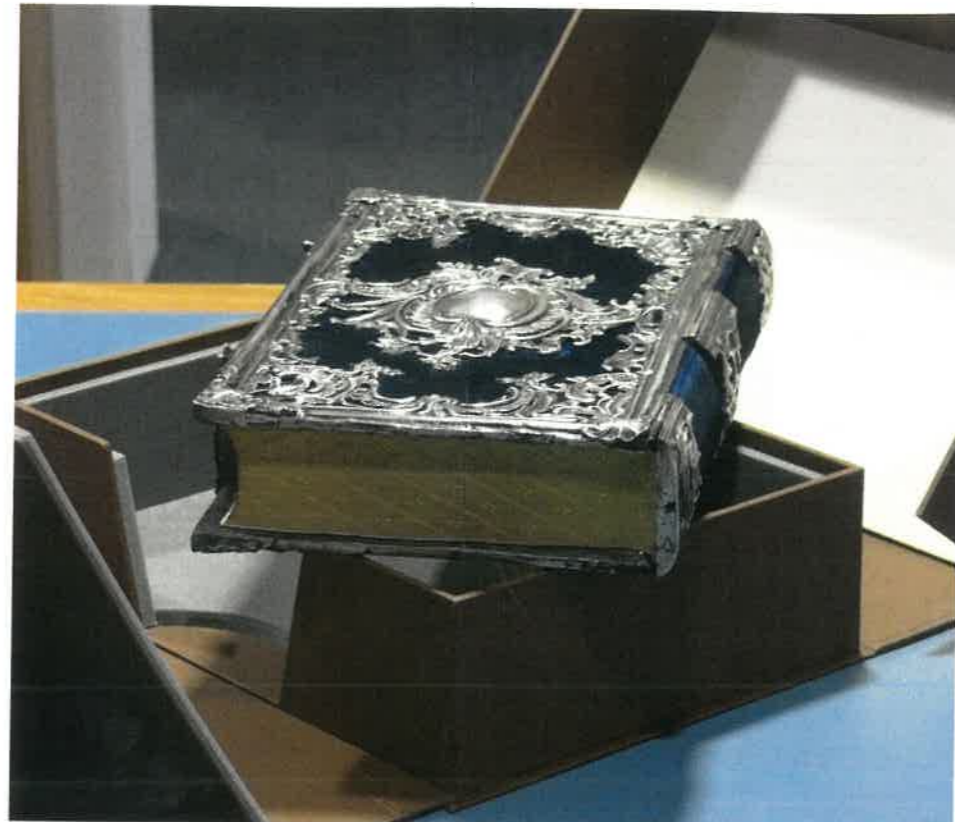


Sir Winston Churchill's *Distant View of Venice* is part of Harrow's 'truly special' collection

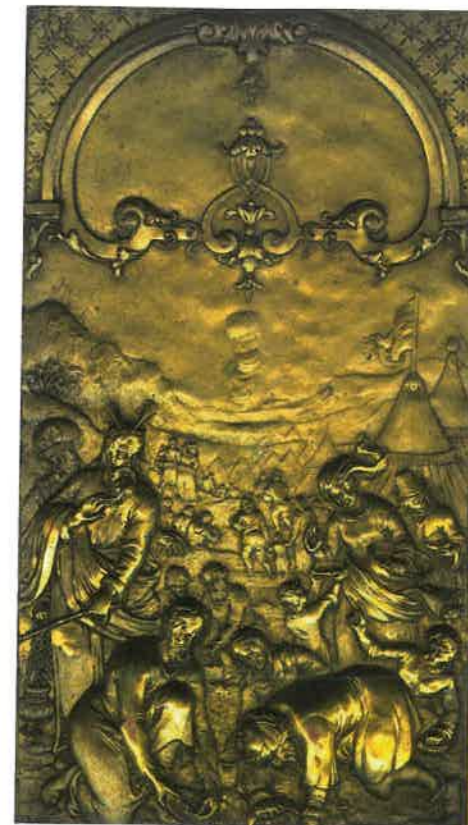


'A rich and rare memorial': Stonyhurst is home to this gold and silk velvet damask cope, originally commissioned by Henry VII in 1495

Harrow School, Janet Graffius; Alamy; Shutterstock; Charterhouse School Archive; Rugby School Museum



The ornately decorated Silver and Gold books are Radley College treasures, used to promote exceptional academic work and actions



mother of the 'father of modern computing'. 'Alan Turing was a pupil at the school from 1926-31 and the archive includes his school reports, which should be compulsory reading for any despairing parent of a teenage boy,' observes Sherborne's archivist Rachel Hassall.

'They range from gems such as "His lack of interest is very depressing except when something amuses him" and "His manner of presenting work is still disgusting & takes away much of the pleasure it should give. He doesn't understand what bad manners bad writing & messy figures are" to his final report, in which the headmaster wrote: "A gifted & distinguished boy, whose future career we shall watch with much interest." The archive also includes the OBE awarded to Turing for his secret service during the Second World War, which, due to the illness of George VI, arrived by post.

Gloriana's song books at Winchester

Portraits by Thomas Lawrence hang in the dining hall at Winchester College in Hampshire; tapestries made for the Court of Henry VII grace the walls of the auditorium where concerts take place; and in the medieval Warden's

'Tapestries made for the Court of Henry VII grace the walls of the college auditorium'

SHERBORNE SCHOOL			
UPPER PERIOD		REPORT FOR TERM	
Name	Address	Address	Age
DOVERY			
PERSONAL SUBJECTS	<p>Classical: He is an excellent student & writes in a clear & concise style.</p> <p>Mathematics: His work in higher arithmetic is very good. He shows a keen interest in the subject & is able to apply his knowledge to practical problems.</p> <p>Physics: He has shown a keen interest in the subject & has done very well in his practical work.</p>	<p>WALTER</p>	1926
DEPARTMENT SUBJECTS	<p>His progress in Latin is very good. He has shown a keen interest in the subject & has done very well in his practical work.</p> <p>English: He has shown a keen interest in the subject & has done very well in his practical work.</p>	<p>WALTER</p>	1926
SPORTS	<p>He is a keen sportsman & has done very well in his practical work.</p>	<p>WALTER</p>	1926
OTHER SUBJECTS	<p>He is a keen sportsman & has done very well in his practical work.</p>	<p>WALTER</p>	1926
REMARKS	<p>He is a very good student & has done very well in his practical work.</p>	<p>WALTER</p>	1926

Sherborne School pupil Alan Turing (left), whose reports reveal 'distinct promise' in mathematics (above)



Lodgings is a rare-book collection with more than 10,000 volumes. Archives are still stored in their original rooms, purpose built by the school's founder in the 14th century, but many of the school's most important artefacts are displayed in the museum, known as Treasury.

Among them is the Election Cup, 'one of the most spectacular pieces of English medieval silver', according to the school's Keeper of Collections, Richard Foster. Dating from the late 15th century, it was given to the college in 1555 by John White, a former Warden of Winchester, and the letter accompanying his gift is still in the archive. 'White intended for the cup to be used at "Election", the annual examination for new scholars, and it is still brought out each year on that occasion,' explains Dr Foster. 'Another exceptional item is a set of four song books that once belonged to Elizabeth I, containing about 100 pieces.' *Winchester College's Treasury is open to the public, free of charge, every afternoon, 2pm-4pm (www.winchestercollege.org)*

Breathing 'greatness and goodness' at Radley

When Radley College in Oxfordshire was founded in 1847, one of its four founding principles was beauty, alongside Christianity, privacy and collegiality—an ethos designed to challenge the existing public-school system. 'We wish to surround the boys with an →



The FA Cup-winning Old Carthusians team of 1881 (above); a replica medal (above right)



William Makepeace Thackeray's specs at Charterhouse

Old Carthusian William Makepeace Thackeray might have parodied the early-19th-century Charterhouse as 'Slaughterhouse' in his fiction, but his writing tray, complete with pens, paint brushes, letter openers, spectacles, gloves and a wallet, kept in the school's archive, offers a beacon of inspiration for budding novelists. Given to Charterhouse by the author's daughter after his death in 1863, together with the original manuscript for *The Newcomes*, which features 'Greyfriars', a thinly disguised Charterhouse, it is only one of an enviably long inventory of riches donated to the Surrey school.

Also listed in *Charterhouse in 100 Objects*, which was published in 2022 to mark 150 years since the school moved from central London to Godalming, Surrey, is a letter written by old boy Robert Baden-Powell soon after his return to England following his successful defence of Mafeking in South Africa at the end of the 19th century. There's Wilfrid Noyce's ice crampons, too, worn by the Old Carthusian when he was part of the triumphant 1953 Everest team, and a replica of the FA Cup gold medal engraved with 'Association Football Challenge Cup won by Old Carthusians 1880-81' and given to the school by the surviving members of the team in 1922.

Several artefacts, including the William Makepeace Thackeray collection, are on loan to The Charterhouse museum in London EC1 (www.thecharterhouse.org)

The Rugby School museum's extensive collection includes a selection of Greek helmets



Winchester's 15th-century Election Cup, a 'spectacular' example of medieval silver

atmosphere breathing greatness and goodness,' reads the diary of Robert Corbet Singleton, one of the school's founders.

Thus, the jewel-like Gold and Silver books, with their ornately decorated boards, became central to school life, designed to record and promote exceptional academic work and actions. They were originally displayed in the chapel so that all could see the achievements of their peers. Still closely guarded, they became the basis of today's awards at the school known as 'copies' and 'distinctions'. In 2014, Radley opened a public gallery, The Sewell Centre Gallery, within its grounds (www.radley.org.uk/sewell-gallery)



Dulwich old boy Ernest Shackleton and his crew haul *James Caird* through the ice during their 800-mile voyage to South Georgia

Beyond the game at Rugby

The game of rugby football is famously reputed to have been invented by William Webb Ellis on The Close at Rugby in Warwickshire in 1823 and the school's museum contains the first, handwritten, rules of the game. However, there are other less-expected artefacts that are equally treasured.

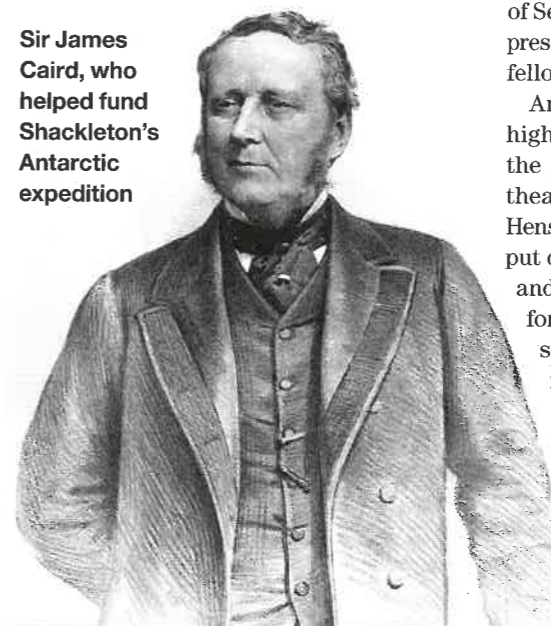
These include Greek and Roman coins donated by alumni; natural-history specimens (19th-century headmaster Dr Thomas Arnold encouraged the boys to bring them back to school after the summer holidays); Greek helmets (one of which was discovered by an Old Rugbeian in the River Tigris); a set of six alabaster vases dating from 4000BC and discovered on one of John Garstang's first excavations in Egypt (he was the founder of the Institute of Archaeology at Liverpool University), given to the school in 1902; and a helmet from the English Civil War. 'These items can ignite a fascination for the lives of people long ago and are an important inspiration for students' various writing, performing and artistic projects,' observes the school archivist Jenny Hunt.

Drop-in tours of Rugby School, including its museum, are available on most Saturday afternoons (www.rugbyschoolenterprises.com)

Shackleton sails on at Dulwich

When the new science laboratory was built at Dulwich College, London SE21, *James Caird*, a 23ft whaler on which old boy Sir Ernest Shackleton made the perilous 1916

Sir James Caird, who helped fund Shackleton's Antarctic expedition



voyage of 800 miles from Elephant Island to South Georgia, was incorporated to be a central part of the design. She can now be seen from every angle at ground level and from above as well: a beacon of inspiration for teenagers dreaming of exploration. After coming back from the Antarctic in 1919, early stops on a tour she made included in the gardens of the Middlesex Hospital and the roof of Selfridges department store, before being presented to the college in 1922 by Shackleton's fellow Old Alleynian John Quiller Rowett.

Another of the school's standout pieces, highlights its archivist Freddie Witts, are the papers of actor Edward Alleyn and theatre proprietor Philip Henslowe, with Henslowe's diary listing all the performances put on at The Rose Playhouse on Bankside and how much they earned; Alleyn's part for Orlando in *Orlando Furioso* is the only surviving English-language cue-script from the period.

Public visits to 'James Caird' are available at 11.30am on Friday mornings and must be booked in advance (www.jamescairdsociety.com)